



MENINGOCOCCAL MENINGITIS

GENERAL INFORMATION

What is meningococcal meningitis?

Meningococcal meningitis is a severe infection of the bloodstream and meninges (a thin lining covering the brain and spinal cord) caused by a bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis*. It is a relatively rare disease and *usually occurs as a single isolated event*. Clusters of cases or outbreaks are rare in the United States.

Who gets meningococcal meningitis?

Anyone can get meningococcal meningitis, but it is more common in infants and children.

How are the bacteria that cause this type of meningitis spread?

The meningococcus bacteria are spread by direct close contact with nose or throat discharges of an infected person. Many people carry these particular bacteria in their nose and throat without any signs of illness, while others may develop serious symptoms.

What are the symptoms?

Although most people exposed to the meningococcus bacteria do not become seriously ill, some may develop fever, headache, vomiting, a stiff neck and a rash. The disease is occasionally fatal.

How soon do the symptoms appear?

The symptoms may appear two to 10 days after exposure, but commonly three to four days after exposure.

When and for how long is an infected person able to spread the disease?

From the time a person is first infected until the bacteria are no longer present in discharges from the nose and throat, he or she may transmit the disease. The duration varies according to treatment used. Patients should be excluded from school, day care or the work place until at least 24 hours after therapy was begun and the illness has subsided.

What is the treatment for meningococcal meningitis?

Certain antibiotics are very effective in eliminating the bacteria from the nose and throat. Penicillin is the drug of choice.

Should people who have been in contact with a diagnosed case of meningococcal meningitis be treated?

Only people who have been in close contact (household members, intimate contacts, health-care personnel performing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, day-care center playmates, etc.) need to be considered for preventive treatment. Such people are usually advised to consult with their physician. Casual contact as might occur in a **regular classroom, office** or factory setting is **not** usually significant enough to cause concern. Close contacts (family, day care, nursery school,

etc.) should be alerted to watch for early signs of illness, especially fever, and seek treatment promptly.

Is there a vaccine to prevent meningococcal meningitis?

Presently, there is a vaccine that will protect against some meningococcal strains. Some situations where the vaccine is recommended are for travel to areas of the world where high rates of the disease are known to occur and for college students living in dorms.

For more information call the North Dakota Department of Health at 701.328.2378.